some of them twenty or thirty miles distant, but haying was a problem. Labor was short at this season, and often more than half the hay was lost. Saur proposed to the superintendent that he let the politicals harvest the hay. The Collective would guarantee that all workers would return to the prison. The superintendent accepted the offer.

The departure was a great event in Alexandrovsk. Four guards were assigned to convoy the party of four score prisoners, who, all together, had some seven hundred years of forced labor to serve. I volunteered to join the party. We walked the whole day along winding rural roads, from hamlet to hamlet, an unusual procession of cheerful, exuberant men in prison garb, with two guards at the head and two others escorting the train of three carts with scythes, kettles, and provisions. Peasants greeted us with cheers.

We reached the first meadow at dusk and at once started to build huts. Young birches were felled and thrust into the ground, one and a half to two feet apart, to form the outer circumference of the hut, except for a three-foot space left for the entrance. Then, after the perimeter was secured, the tops of the trees were turned down toward the center and branches interwoven to form the ceiling and reinforce the walls. Freshly mown grass served for beds. A field kitchen was built in the middle of the camp. The huts were completed by the light of campfires. Supper was ready. I strolled from fire to fire, talking to friends I had left behind bars when I transferred to the work gang.

In the morning we started mowing in the traditional Russian way—one of the most taxing and, at the same time, most exhilarating jobs imaginable. Each group of eight or ten mowers has a section of the meadow; the headman of the group starts mowing; the next man goes three steps to the right and two steps behind him; the third man comes at the same distance from the second, and so forth. The whole group follows the rhythm set by the headman and moves along the front, twenty-four to thirty steps wide, as a unit; another group covers the next section of the meadow.

The work went on until sunset. Suddenly pitch-black darkness enveloped the meadow, and before supper was ready a torrential rain and storm broke out. Our campfires were drowned, our huts flooded, and we sat under the downpour fascinated by flashes of lightning, each revealing new cloud formations. Then the storm whirled away, the stars reappeared, and the silence was interrupted only by the gurgling of invisible brooklets. We could not sleep, not because there was no dry spot but because the night, every moment of it, was too beautiful.

Next day we resumed work. A dozen prisoners stayed in the huts, however, too tired to move. But the four guards—all local peasants—